

Where machines tread lightly and nature returns

From mountain forests and airport lagoons to riverbanks and coastal cliffs, W.L. Straughan & Son uses Yanmar Compact Equipment to reach challenging sites throughout northern England while protecting the surrounding landscapes.

A wooden Gruffalo stands in the yard at W.L. Straughan & Son's base in Bedlington, in the northern English county of Northumberland. The much-loved monster from Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's children's story once formed part of a family trail high in the Lake District, inviting young visitors to search for familiar characters among the trees.

When the sculpture needed replacing, the steep forest route was beyond the reach of wheeled equipment. A Yanmar C30R TV tracked carrier transported the new Gruffalo into position before bringing the original home. The unusual souvenir captures the character of W.L. Straughan: a business accustomed to reaching difficult places and working carefully within them.

"All of our work is specialist, and no two jobs are the same," explains Director Gary Miller. "When you're high on a mountain or miles from the nearest road, you need people and machines you can rely on."

Built from the ground up

W.L. Straughan began 40 years ago with one machine picking stones on an opencast site. Landscaping and agricultural contracting followed before the family business developed the environmental expertise that shapes it today. Gary and co-Director Dan Straughan joined as excavator operators in 2006 and later helped guide that transition.

The company now employs more than 70 people, largely from within 30 miles of Bedlington, and invests over £100,000 each year in training. "We've built a really passionate local team, who are from the land and care about the future of our environment." Gary comments.

Made for difficult ground

W.L. Straughan has used Yanmar machines for 20 years. Its current fleet including a ViO80 excavator alongside C30R TV and C50R TV tracked carriers, used on sites ranging from remote forests to locations 20 miles from the nearest road. "With a tracked carrier, you can reach places people would think you couldn't even walk to," Gary explains. "The low ground pressure is a massive advantage on wet sites because it creates less disturbance and leaves less mess."

On the northeast coast, the C50R TV carried materials via a steep cliff access route and along the beach while the ViO80 worked on sea defenses. Neither a wheeled dumper nor a four-wheel-drive vehicle could negotiate the terrain. Operating so close to the water, biodegradable hydraulic oil helped reduce the environmental impact of any potential leak.

While at Newcastle International Airport, the C30R TV is clearing steep-sided settlement lagoons just 30 meters from the runway, with aircraft taking off overhead. The netted ponds



collect spillages and antifreeze runoff, but leave little room for conventional machinery. “Without a tracked carrier, we would have no chance of getting into those lagoons.”

Where nature returns

The projects that mean most to Gary reveal their true impact after the machines have left. Earlier in 2026, the team restored a stream on the Duke of Northumberland’s estate that had been dug into a straight, canal-like channel 50 years earlier. By returning it to a meandering course, W.L. Straughan created space for new wetland habitat to develop.

In 2023, the company constructed five fish passes on the River Allen to help fish migrate upstream, using the ViO80 to position stone while tracked carriers moved materials along difficult riverbank routes. Before construction could begin, the river had to be diverted or over-pumped to create a dry working area, with fish and crayfish rescued and ecological surveys coordinated around seasonal windows.

Staggered stone steps were then used to form channels and pools where fish could gather enough momentum to continue upstream. The depth and velocity of the water had to be carefully controlled – if a pool failed to retain enough water, the stone might have to be removed and repositioned.

“At the time, you don’t always realize the impact it will have down the line,” Gary reflects. “Now I hear fishermen talking, or see people saying there are salmon farther up the river, and I think, ‘We did that.’ That is something I’m proud of.”

A community in bloom

This August, W.L. Straughan supported The Alnwick Garden and SUEZ UK with a project celebrating the Garden’s 25th anniversary. Local schools and volunteer groups planted 6,500 sunflower seeds supplied by the company, along with the pots, compost and support needed to help them grow. The seedlings will later form a sunflower field at SUEZ UK’s Seghill nature trail. “As a local business, it means a lot to help create something the whole community can be part of,” Gary explains.

It is a fitting expression of HANASAKA. Meaning ‘to make flowers bloom’, Yanmar’s corporate philosophy and social contribution initiative is rooted in helping people realize their potential and creating opportunities for communities to flourish.

Support that goes the distance

W.L. Straughan has worked with Taylor & Braithwaite, the Cumbria-based Yanmar CE dealer, since 2014. Gary values the shared family-business outlook and has also formed a close friendship with Area Sales Manager Chris Jordan. “Chris has become a good friend, but that relationship is backed by excellent product knowledge and first-class support,” he says. “They are around 90 miles away, yet if we need them, they will do everything possible to get somebody to us that same day.”

The Gruffalo in the yard may be the most visible reminder of W.L. Straughan’s work, but its deeper legacy is alive elsewhere – in recovering rivers and wetlands, and in a local workforce growing with the business. With Yanmar equipment and support that reaches even the most remote sites, W.L. Straughan is showing how a lighter footprint can leave lasting progress.